



**Review: [Untitled]**

Reviewed Work(s):

*Brazil* by Terry Gilliam

Fred Glass

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# Reviews

## BRAZIL

Director: Terry Gilliam. Script: Gilliam, Tom Stoppard, and Charles McKeown. Music: Michael Kamen. Photography: Roger Pratt. Universal.

During the long-awaited year 1984 a veritable deluge of articles, books, talks, speeches and more were given over to discussion ad nauseam of Orwell's book and prophecies. *Nineteen Eighty Four* became the province, in 1984, of a battle for the most prevalent interpretation of totalitarian society—whose resembles it more, “theirs” or “ours”: the USSR or the USA. It should have surprised no one that most leftist accounts attempted to tabulate the qualities of life in America in the eighties that clearly showed capitalism as finally having achieved Orwellian thought control—TV, governmental newspeak, powerless manipulated masses, big science. The right, meanwhile, redoubled its efforts at painting the Soviet Union in the drabest of greys, with police helmets atop the dour heads of half the population stomping across the supine bodies of the other half.

What a relief, then, that Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*, the following year, rose above the general soporific level of that ideological fray to propose for us a critical vision of the world at once more sophisticated than Orwell's and more challenging to its audience—a work perhaps doomed to lesser status in cultural history for these very reasons. For while *Nineteen Eighty Four*, within Orwell's intent, may with some legitimacy be claimed by both left and right as “proof” of the politics of each, *Brazil*'s critique of our world, in its ambiguities and twilit despair, is not so easily digestible. There can be no doubt that the main fire in this movie is trained toward bureaucratic consumer capitalism. And yet its portrayal of a working class irrelevant and oblivious to the horrors of everyday life under an authoritarian regime leaves little room for socialists to claim the film as their own. What, then, is *Brazil*?

Referring years later to his second film, *Before the Revolution*, Bertolucci said, “We all misunderstood Brecht at that time.” Maybe

it took Godard's explorations in political cinema of the late sixties and early seventies to clear away the lingering ghost of the German playwright for modern left wing filmmakers. Godard's emphasis on the author's end of things proved, if nothing else, that a popular cinema demands popular means, even if an *ultimate* goal remains the subversion and destruction of its own illusionistic devices. The closest Godard ever came to realizing such a balance in his work was arguably *Tout va bien*; while Bertolucci swung back to self-confessed bourgeois film-making in 1900 to communicate the PCI's schematic appraisal of Italian events. Ten years later, building on the experiments of *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life* and *Time Bandits*, Terry Gilliam has produced in *Brazil* his variant of Brechtian cinema for the eighties. But this political film-maker's worldview comes across with substantial differences from his predecessors, whose working-class focus and optimism have given way in Gilliam's work before certain stark truths about late capitalist culture.

*Brazil* is a tragicomedy about the relationship between imagination and fantasy, and about the ability of a society (“somewhere in the 20th century,” as the opening sequence informs us) to constantly transform the energy of the former into the dead weight of the latter. Excellent performances by the principal actors abets the direction by Gilliam, which in places falls short of the brilliant writing by Gilliam, Tom Stoppard, and Charles McKeown. The structure of the film's plot is relatively simple, even if the plot itself—and everything else about the film—is extraordinarily complex. Sam Lowry (Jonathan Pryce), who works in a giant bureaucracy (the Ministry of Information) escapes from his feelings of guilt and the oppressive tedium of his life through fantasizing. When Jill, the woman of his dreams (Kim Greist), shows up in real life and turns out to be a suspected terrorist, he jeopardizes his job and then his existence in wooing her. The narrative of Sam's day-to-day reality, and the story of his gradual fall, is periodically interrupted by his flights of fancy. When Sam is finally arrested to be tortured, a commando team of rescuers pulls him to safety, and he escapes to the country with Jill. But it's just another fantasy; the last scene reveals him alone in the torture cham-

ber, its vast space filling with the clouds of his dreams, and the soundtrack with the 1939 song “Brazil” segueing into the rhythms of carnival or the credits:

The “space” of this film defies temporality: not just literally, as in the hero’s fantasies, lifting him from daily drudgery into the false liberated zones of his psyche’s wish-fulfillment, but in the metaphoric creation of a simultaneous past/future, itself the work of imagination posing its alternative to fantasy precisely because of how it resembles—tantalizingly—something in the shape of our present. Unlike most of the hi-tech dreck mini-genres to which *Brazil* bears superficial resemblance, this film doesn’t rely on the stock sci-fi device of future-discussing-present to speak of our own world. Instead, it lifts just enough from post-*Star Wars* cinematic technique to present the initial appearance of futuristic genre plays—only the better to undercut those conventions with numerous startling reversals of plot, character, theme, and expectation. The *Bladerunneresque* monumentalism of the buildings, for instance, resolves, upon closer examination, into faithful reproductions of thirties fascist architecture.

In fact, all manner of thirties and forties visual imagery predominates, from architecture to technology, in references to popular culture of the period like Chaplin’s *Great Dictator*, the Marx Brothers, and *Casablanca*, as well as the title song. World War II-style posters in the distinctive mold of the Englishman Abram Games help set the social atmosphere of the world in which Sam dwells (“Don’t Suspect a Friend—Report Him!”).<sup>1</sup>

Sam’s fantasy imagery owes much to Nazi suggestion, as well; his armor and soaring wings recall the Hitler posters “The Flag Bearer” and “Germany Lives!”;<sup>2</sup> and the opening scenes of the film, amid billowing stratospheric clouds, quote Riefenstahl’s beginning for *Triumph of the Will*. The terrifying scenes of police bursting into apartments and capturing suspected enemies of the state lift the central element of Ben Shahn’s poster, produced for the Office of War Information in 1942, “This is Nazi Brutality,” with its semi-surreal hooded prisoner about to be shot.<sup>3</sup> Even cutesy machines, like the camera eye on extender arms that could be an Industrial Light and Magic effect, are vastly out-



BRAZIL

numbered by a profusion of post-World War I office machines, in which the ubiquitous computer-video screens find themselves embedded. The portmanteau past/future technologies, while adding their own weight to the between-wars visual style, also, curiously, provide a clue to deciphering the Oedipus play within the social drama, the other side of Gilliam’s vision.

Lowry’s fantasies take on increasing amounts of restrictive, disturbing baggage after the first, joyous Dedaelus ride above the clouds. Standing between him and his amour is a metallic samurai warrior, towering over Lowry, disappearing instantly as Lowry charges it, its own glittering armor and weapon more massive and threatening than poor Sam’s. The warrior is but one of several fathers for Lowry, struggling within his unconscious to come to terms with his felt oppression and life that would be empty were it not filled with something worse. Macabre guilt-creatures show up in his fantasies following his abortive visit to the widow Mrs. Buttle’s apartment, her husband tortured to death over a bureaucratic error. All his dreams likewise perfectly reflect social realities that he refuses to face directly. Each dream has its material antecedents carefully placed within the narrative, material in two senses: the mundane everyday material of people and things transformed, condensed, etc.; and the film’s gradually accumulating *material analysis* of the psychological relationship between the individual Lowry and the oppressive social structures arrayed against (and internalized by) him.

Why does Lowry fantasize? The film poses three unavoidable reasons: the dead weight of

meaningless or immoral work; the stultifying leisure of a parasitic consumerist culture; and his familial burden of guilt and Oedipal anguish, as personified by the various fathers (Kurtzmann, Helpmann, the actual absent father, the samurai), but more importantly, by Mother. Authority and power relentlessly foist themselves on poor Everyman Sam wherever he turns. It's no surprise he begins to confuse them in his inner life when in fact they share a great many characteristics. Work, leisure, dreams: he literally has nowhere to go.

Lowry thinks he has only dreamt his fantasy woman. In fact he has dreamt his mother, whose overbearing intrusion into his life takes many forms. But his dream woman also actually exists, as her own person, and as someone who is quite different—active, capable, thoughtful—than he has fantasized. The dual history of Sam's relationship to Jill/mother unites, ultimately, beneath the signifier of the same actress.

This part of *Brazil* reproduces in psychological miniature the two worlds in which Lowry dwells. Just as his real world is a condensation of historical fascism with the consumerist present—an iron past in a velvet glove—his fantasy life, apparently soaring freely in the skies inside his mind, actually revolves around his reaction to and internal transformation of that fearful authoritarian world into emotional symbols, rendered the more powerful through combination with the authoritative material of his mother.

Gilliam presents this world as in large part an historical regression, the fast and loose play with technological eras one aspect of a more generalized picture of decay masquerading as progress. Mother, through surgical treatments that the very rich can afford, regresses too: growing younger and younger as the story unfolds. Her best friend, undergoing similar treatments with another doctor, keeps suffering "complications," which by the end of the film have killed her. She is the Dorian Gray portrait of Mother; her painfully shy daughter, preserving symmetry, mirrors Sam as the emotionally crippled child of a rich woman. The maître d' at Mother's favorite restaurant almost doesn't recognize her; by the time Sam attends a party at her penthouse she has men younger than him fawning over her. When Sam makes love to Jill in his

mother's bed it is unclear, for a moment, with whom he frolics. (He does announce, in a neat reversal, that he has just "killed" Jill in Helpmann's office. The pieces are all there, but a little jumbled.) During his last, long fantasy, however, the relationship between Jill and Mother as signifiers in Sam's internal universe finally becomes explicit, perhaps because Sam now too has achieved a regressive apotheosis, the culmination of all his fantasizing.

After escaping the torturer's chair and blowing up the MOI, Lowry runs up a ramp into a huge building, its columns semicircled around it with the aid of a wide angle lens in gathering darkness. Lowry, with subjective camera, faces two doors, large crosses on each (Chaplin's "double-cross" from *The Great Dictator*). The screen is nearly filled by the unctuous face of the maître d' from the restaurant; he ushers Sam/us into a bizarre funeral service for Lowry's mother's friend, who finally has succumbed to her "complications." Her picture is on the wall, and her coffin rotates slowly on a dais as a minister drones on. We see the back of Mother, a circle of young male admirers clustered around her. Lowry runs to her, calling out "Mother!" She turns, and it's the face of Jill, Mother's treatments having apparently brought her to this. Sam continues to cry out to her until the funeral service is interrupted by the arrival of the police. Sam overturns the coffin and a gelatinous skeleton spills out onto the floor. He dives into the coffin, falling through blackness. Landing in the street, in familiar nightmarish terrain from his earlier fantasies, he is pursued by hideous baby-masked creatures (some pushing shopping carts covered with coffins) onto a pile of ducts, to a blank wall. They move forward toward him. Miraculously his hand finds a knob. He turns it and steps inside the door, closing it against the onrushing creatures. We hear a motor. He's inside the prefab house Jill had tried to deliver before, on the trailer of Jill's truck. They drive through the night, and by morning we see their rig parked in the green countryside. The camera tracks back and up, into the sky, the earth unrolling in all directions, music swelling triumphantly.

The last fantasy, particularly Sam's condensation of Jill with his mother's regressive movement to her lost youth, tears the veil off

Lowry's oedipal secret: his Icarus dreams, grounded, are only so much infantile mother-lust. His fantasy escape from work drudgery and controlled consumption—potentially understandable as liberation, albeit brief, from the world he hates—in fact only brings him back onto the personal/historical tracks of his psyche, which run in a circle.

Earlier in the film Sam and Jill drive up a road away from the oil fields where she has picked up a package, which Sam fears is a bomb. The highway is lined with billboards so closely packed together that from the road one cannot catch any glimpse of the devastated industrial landscape on the other side. Lowry's belief in his fantasies parallels the road: blinders presented as liberation.

The last long fantasy sequence ostensibly settles accounts with "father," as displaced from Helpmann into the building and institution that he runs, the MOI. All the structures of arbitrary authority, irrationalist logic and brutality are condensed and blown sky-high. Better, the samurai has been replaced with a more accurately symbolized figure for Sam's oppression. Sam is then able to go and resolve his relationship, similarly, with mother in the funeral service. But at high cost: experiencing his death diving through the vagina/coffin. When he comes out the other side of his trip through the underworld he is enabled finally to escape with Jill and live the fantasy through to its conclusion. But as Helpmann ironically comments, "He got away from us"—an escape that leaves them alive and Lowry dead.

The message can be read, typically for this film, at least two ways. Either the possibilities to change things, both for the individual and society, are nil; or—and I think the preponderant weight of *Brazil*'s evidence rests in this direction—change is possible only if it is attempted outside the ideological terms dictated by oppressive social structures. This means, with Lowry's fate the alternative, steering clear of the everpresent temptation to fantasize one's way toward a solution.

*Brazil*'s world is a nightmarish synthesis of Marx's critique of capitalism and the worst fears of Freud about human potential in history. The Frankfurt School's classic analyses of fascism in the thirties and forties explored the dialectic of social forces and psychic response, with the initial revolutionary impulse

of their studies ultimately tailing off into the terrible sense of humanity having reached an historical blind alley. The Marxist-Freudian analysis of such thinkers around the school as Wilhelm Reich, Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin remained as sharp-edged as any social critique of the time. But their work could not recapture the optimism of the earlier generations of Marxism, and for good reason. The Frankfurt vision was informed by the experiences of the twenties and thirties: failed revolutions in Western Europe, decline of mass participation and bureaucratization of the Russian Revolution; a capitalism in deep crisis but with a working class too numbed by unemployment and hunger, on one side, and rising Fordist consumerism, on the other, to do anything with the opportunity.

*Brazil* unites the understanding of these social forces of the period and the psychological responses called into being by them in its grim story. The result, more Benjamin than Brecht, is nonetheless not completely without hope. This single ray of light emanates from the relationship set up between imagination and fantasy in the film.

Imagination might be defined as the ability to project something other than what is, in such a way as to be able to realize the image in reality. It is a hopeful response and alternative to the external pressure of social oppression. Fantasy, as poor second choice, is the ghost of imagination strangled, where one's own felt oppression is turned inward and relief sought helplessly in images shaped by that oppression. The opening scene of the film sets the stage for this dichotomous paradigm: the Riefenstahl quote opens up the territory of fascist imagery for exploration by the story, the scene shifting from the sky to high inside the lobby of the MOI, moving down the statue of an iron eagle to its base, where a woman slaps a little boy in front of the statue's motto: "The truth shall make you free."

The narrative expression of this difference between imagination and fantasy can be illuminated by the opposition utopia/dystopia. *Brazil* is almost entirely dystopic, to be sure. But it asks us to consider the *sources* of dystopia through distancing devices: filmic quotes, wrenching narrative reversals, Walter Mitty structuring, and some particularly effec-

tive uses of music. In the scene where Jill and Sam finally kiss in his mother's apartment, the moment is heralded by loud "Hollywood romance" music bursting onto the soundtrack, its intent impossible through exaggeration to miss. And at the end of the film, following the revelation that Sam's escape was another fantasy, the music of carnival gives us, for the first time, a direct reference to the country Brazil, posing the question, why now? The distancing devices compel us to seek relief in imagining *something different*, if for no other reason than because the choice between reality and fantasy—as offered by Sam's example—is so brutally limited.

The last scene, lingering on through the credits, sums up the argument of the film. The visual presentation of Sam dwarfed by the immense torture chamber, the room filling with the clouds of his/Riefenstahl's dreams, graphically charts the individual's capitulation to the torture chamber of society, even—especially—in the very moment of attempting a private escape through fantasy. The expressionist externalizing of internal spaces, which in turn have been absorbed from public fantasy, or ideology—here exposes the simple fact that fantasy stands in the way of imagination.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about *Brazil* is its internal consistency and coherence. Each of the parts fit together in a seamless symbolic universe, where more important than exact relationships between them is their simple copresence. Throughout *Brazil* the images accumulate without Gilliam forcing their connection: and yet they connect. The food in the restaurant is delivered in small piles of colored mush, with a photograph attached to the plate of what the dish is supposed to be: steak, seafood, etc. Rich people become young again through surgery, although sometimes the treatment has 'complications.' Billboards lining the road block out the view of a gutted landscape. Screens are thrown up around the horribly wounded people in restaurants and department stores after terrorist bombings, so that the consumers can continue with their consumption undisturbed. Mrs. Buttle signs the proffered forms, accepting a receipt for her husband whom she knows will never return. Worse, Sam's old friend Jack

(Michael Palin, another Monty Python alumnus) has moved beyond passive acceptance to active complicity with the terrorist state regime. And Lowry creates his own world, made up of elements of the real one that are themselves created for people like him. Again and again the power of fantasy to block out a painful reality and provide an ersatz substitute for imagination seems to offer a solution, even as its fateful passivity prevents the imaginative activity that could address the problem.

Gilliam has a knack, inherited from Monty Python, of taking older media materials and reworking them into "something completely different." The old gag of the boss turning his back for a moment, allowing the workers to goof off, is replayed with Kurtzmann inside his office, aware that everyone is watching *Casablanca* on their computer/video screens. He can *hear* the sound of hundreds of monitors thundering out the lines of the movie; when he wrenches open the door and looks out, all is business as usual. More than the gag, which is well-timed, is how it fits the film's argument. Collectively responding to their meaningless jobs sorting information, the workers in the MOI stage a little revolt as soon as the boss provides them with the opportunity. What seems to be rebellion—and it *is*, at one level—ultimately loops back to the advantage and continuity of the system as an entirety, for this remains a harmless revolt, a diversion from any more direct confrontation with the forces in power.

Lowry, by contrast, daydreams himself into incessant engagement with the mythic embodiments of evil power. His idyllic flights in the clouds are interrupted by giant corporate monoliths thrusting out of the ground, separating him and Jill; by brick-covered hands and face of a giant animated Kurtzman, erupting from the street, holding him back from flying; and most insistently, the huge samurai, another reference, perhaps, to thirties fascism, but also a seemingly invincible male power, barely human, another combination of past (feudal Japan) with future (all metal). Tellingly, the very moment of Lowry's triumph over the evil warrior occurs as he is busy getting himself clubbed into unconsciousness in his ill-considered attempt to rescue Jill in the department store. Here the function of his

fantasies becomes painfully clear: it provides him with just enough subjective resistance to state terror that he reveals himself, and becomes its object.

Two characters represent the possibility for a more effective resistance, Jill and Tuttle. Jill sees through the machinations of the state bureaucracy and the myriad ideological systems it utilizes because she cares—without becoming maudlin—about human beings. This puts her into direct conflict with the worldview and practices of nearly everyone around her. Her query to Sam, “How many terrorists have you ever actually seen?” stops him in his tracks, because he has never questioned the incessant propaganda from the media about terrorism, nor, for that matter, about anything else. His individual resistance is so privatized that no relationship has evolved in his mind between his personal frustrations and the real world. Jill’s conscious distance from the ‘common sense’ of their society leads her to try to comfort Mrs. Buttle when her husband is mistakenly carried off by the police, and to attempt redress with the bureaucracy. Her efforts earn her a large file in Jack’s office and official suspicion of terrorism.

Tuttle (Robert de Niro), a former Central Services worker, now has a file himself as a “freelance subversive.” His hostility to paperwork led him to operate on his own, tapping people’s phonecalls and discovering when they needed help with their omnipresent ducts (“Why a duck?”). Unfortunately his well-intentioned assistance in unofficially repairing Sam’s ducts—based on the slogan he repeats to Sam a couple of times “We’re all in this together”—brings down on Sam the vicious enmity of the sadistic Central Services workers, who savage his apartment, running ducts out of the walls and through all his rooms, lowering the temperature to freezing and finally forcing him out of his home. Sam’s revenge against them, effected by Tuttle, notably does not bring him back his apartment, and is of a piece with the ineffectiveness of Tuttle’s flashy, swashbuckling adventures (played with madcap abandon by de Niro).

Jill and Tuttle come closest of all the characters in *Brazil* to possessing something resembling imagination, and together spin one of the three slim, fragile threads of hope in the

film. Their differences with the culture at large lead them to action against its excesses. Unhappily neither comes particularly close to success, Jill’s efforts on Mrs. Buttle’s behalf running afoul of the Kafkaesque rules of the bureaucracy, and Tuttle’s good works undone by the Central Service workers. Even in Sam’s climactic fantasy Tuttle loses, done in by the papers he fled Central Services to avoid.

Nowhere does the film offer explanation of their failure directly, lending substance to the sense that the film finally holds out nothing beyond despair for its audience. But one may infer that their failure is that of the individual response to a collective problem, to a social structure capable of absorbing or neutralizing individual revolts. Several times we see a billboard, looking like the famous billboard in the photo from Depression America with a happy family driving in their car, a breadline stretched out below it. The slogan, each time we see the sign in *Brazil*, is obscured. Only during Sam’s false flight from the torture chamber we are allowed to read the slogan, which turns out to be Tuttle’s “We’re all in this together.”

The high point of hope in the narrative occurs when the commandos led by Tuttle rescue Sam. Even before we learn that Sam has only dreamt the entire episode several clues warn us to beware: the dozen or so rescuers are gradually cut to ribbons; the worker in the MOI lobby pays no attention to the fierce struggle, and is killed herself in the crossfire; and Tuttle himself, wrapped in paper, is “disappeared” after apparently blowing up the MOI. Without the assistance of the working class, armed struggle against the authoritarian state is futile, a positive lesson as well as a moment of despair in the story. The lesson is underlined by the quote, during the scenes inside the MOI lobby, from *Potemkin*, i.e., an historical moment when armed revolt succeeded for the same reasons.

The third hopeful sign in *Brazil* is curiously Sam’s fantasies, precisely through clearly demonstrating the impotence of his dream life and its complicity with fascist culture. The graphically negative example of Sam; the moral resistance of Jill and Tuttle; and the electrifying collective rescue, for one moment: these are the small redemptions of *Brazil*’s

dark worldview, which together breach the despair with some photons of hope.

Whether all these levels of meaning make it from screen to audience is a matter of conjecture, one that I'll propose a glib answer to: not likely. But the virtue of Gilliam's approach is in how he constructs many doorways for his audience. The film can be enjoyed as a visual extravaganza, with the aid of a special effects budget that must have made the former Monty Python cut-out animator very happy; as post-modern stylizing; as a dystopia in the tradition of *Metropolis*, *Nineteen Eighty Four*, *Bladerunner* and the like; as existential nightmare like Kafka's *The Trial*; as a black comedy—the list could go on indefinitely because it's all there. Once inside Gilliam's film, however, the same sense of hypnotic fascination seems to capture each member of the audience, no matter how they arrived. And this ultimately means that something in the vision of *Brazil* reverberates with the late capitalist experience, the subjectivity that engages with urban vastness, with faceless bureaucracy, with the moral decay accompanying the commodification of all social relationships—and with the individual's daily efforts to cope with it all.

Lowry's confused rejection of the social norm is based on a healthy impulse. Unluckily for him, so powerful is the enemy that it can even control the forms of revolt against it, channeling their aberrations like the arrow-straight road lined with advertisements concealing the devastated landscape behind it. If *Brazil* offers any answer to this impasse, it is in the segue of the song at the end into the sounds of carnival, the moment when the film's title finally reveals its significance: the utopian promise of the festival, which breaks down the innumerable barriers of everyday reality in the name of joyous celebration, which deliberately confuses appearances and reality through the ruse of the mask, the great social leveller, so that appearance and reality may be posed as a direct question; and which gives license to break free of social constraint so that desire and its object can find one another, if only for one transcendent moment. Carnival, the structuring absence of *Brazil*, defines the imagination and its power suffusing every frame of a film about its fantasy-ridden other, our daily lives. —FRED GLASS

## NOTES

1. Rhodes, Anthony, *Propaganda, The Art of Persuasion: World War II*, 1976, Chelsea House Publishers, pp. 124–128.
  2. Rhodes, p. 43–4.
  3. Rhodes, p. 171.
- The distinction "imagination/fantasy" is elaborated nicely in Stephen Robinson's "The Art of the Possible," *Radical Science* 15, Oct. 1984.

## SHOAH

A film by Claude Lanzmann. New Yorker Films.

*Shoah* (the Hebrew word for annihilation) is a nine and a half hour documentary on the Holocaust culled from 350 hours of film. Like the event it commemorates, the film overwhelms with its enormity. This is not so much a function of its length as of the vastness of its conception, the accumulation of facts, and the breadth of people and places documented.

Despite the deluge of books and films which have appeared on the subject, *Shoah* differs from all that has come before, even though almost everything related by the film's multiple speakers is knowledge already known. What *Shoah* accomplishes is a total immersion into another reality. Director Claude Lanzmann achieves this through piling detail on detail, by repetition, by allowing subjects open-ended time to tell their story, by claustrophobic close-ups, and by the film's circular structure. Together these create a cumulative effect both chilling and numbing; the film takes days to reach its full impact.

Like Alain Resnais's masterful *Night and Fog*, one of the great documentaries on the same subject, *Shoah* deals with memory—the desire to forget, the need to remember. However, while *Night and Fog* is structured on contrast—then/now, black-and-white/color, archival footage/present-day footage, the death factories then/the deserted buildings now, *Shoah* tends to collapse the past into the present, blurring the distinctions, making the past come alive again, making the past part of the present.

Like many previous films on the Holocaust (Lanzmann dislikes the term because of its implication of natural disaster and because it has been appropriated for so many other situations), *Shoah* covers all of the major events—the ghettoization of the Jews, the transport